

# A boy and his dog

Seemingly within minutes of the Christmas sale signs coming down, the Valentine's advertisements go up. God have mercy on the man who forgets to buy a gift for his wife or girlfriend on Valentine's Day.

But there's another creature who brings enormous amounts of love to our world, and never demands a gift. I'm talking about dogs.

Yes, I know that I frequently talk about my weekly visits to see the cats at Animal Rescue in Pennsylvania. But I often neglect to mention that I am always escorted to their home by a small army of dogs. There are usually six or seven barking dogs greeting me at the gates. I talk to them and pet them. They show no ill will that I'm going to visit cats. In their typical, unconditionally loving way, they escort me to the "cat house" and leave me there.

As I look back at my childhood, I think it's fair to say that my dog saved my life. I would come home from grade school at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Essex. Our little apartment was empty. My father was absent. My mother was working. My older brother and sisters were either in school or at work. But my dog, King, was there.

Each day as I came in the door, King would explode with joy. He would run back and forth, barking, wagging his tail, jumping on me, licking me. King didn't know he was poor. He only knew that he was loved.

As soon as I could change clothes, I would take King for a walk. We would head for Weber's Woods, right across from the church. It was always an adventure.

Recently I came across a coffee table type book, with wonderful pictures and commentary, titled "Why Dogs Are Better Than Cats," by Bradley Trevor Greive. While I obviously disagree with the title, the text is humorous and insightful, and the color photographs by Rachael Hale are wonderful.

Allow me to quote just one entry: "Dogs offer us such vast amounts of help and happiness and yet seek almost nothing in return. They are just glad to be with you.

The smallest gesture of kindness generates a disproportionate outpouring of affection. To a dog, every morsel is a feast. Every kind word, a symphony of delight. Every pet, a thunderclap of joy. In their minds, every time you go out for a walk together you are ascending the steps toward heaven.”

Allow me to close with one final quote from Greive:

“Life without dogs is too awful to contemplate. I really don’t know what would happen to the future of humanity without the dog’s example of unconditional acceptance, eager support, and joie de vivre, but I suspect a great emptiness would open up where love and hope used to be. Though you may not realize it, much of what makes civilization work begins and ends with love and hope. The wheels of steel may continue to turn, but without our faithful friends, the modern world and all its marvels could not prevent the collective human heart from grinding to a joyless halt.”

May you give and receive love on Valentine’s Day. And may you always know and remember God’s unconditional love for you.